

Motorcoach Summary from NOTICE Citizen Task Force Representative

MY OBSERVATIONS on the MOTORCOACHES ISSUE

1. The writing of some notwithstanding, the motorcoach problem in Alexandria is NOT acute, nor is it likely to get that way. It is NOT a 24x7 problem, nor is it a 12 month problem. It is mainly a daytime issue, for 3-4 months April thru June. There are coaches in the evenings, obviously, drop off and pick up early evening near Market Square. And there are destination coaches dropping/picking up at hotels.
2. I claim no scientific reporting, but on many occasions I have been about on my scooter, deliberately observing and determining the actions of the busses and their drivers.
3. I find that in general drivers are courteous, they observe the law to the max (because they, not the company pay the tickets), and they use the streets that take them most directly to their locations. They are not rumbling thru town and destroying the infrastructure; they are not in the main dropping trash out the windows as some would have us believe. They tend NOT to show up too early, for example to pick up at Market Square, but rather drop off and pick up typically in well less than 30 minutes.
4. Questions of SCALE of the coaches related to the area in which they operate.
 - a. Some others may raise this objection as perhaps their primary and motivating objection to the report
 - b. There are clearly significant and valid questions of SCALE of the busses for Old Town.
 - c. Many argue that the biggest busses (>40') are of disproportionate size for Old Town and should be banned altogether.
 - d. I cannot NOW go so far as to support a ban, although I completely agree with the scale argument.
 - i. Some (but not all) of these busses do bring money-spending tourists to town.
 - ii. We are one of the oldest towns in America, and we owe it to ourselves and to visiting citizens to promote our history, even if it does mean larger busses until viable transportation and sightseeing alternatives emerge.
 - iii. There is no current viable solution that does not involve major funding from the City (highly unlikely in today's economic climate) for such things as new or greatly expanded shuttle bus service, or licensed step-on guides, or a visitor center where busses report before the sightseeing.
 - iv. Nor are we aware of an entrepreneur standing in the wings, for example, just waiting for the opportunity to run his fleet of electric busses all over Old Town.
 - v. Therefore, without viable alternatives, I am prepared to live with the scale problem pro tem.

THE DRAFT REPORT CONCLUSIONS and my observations thereon

1. Make some minor adjustments in traffic flow for busses unit block of King Street.p.7

I support this, and it is essentially being done now anyhow

2. Appoint an advisory committee to oversee future motorcoach operations.p.7

Citizen representation is essential on this group, lest it become merely an organ of the City or others with vested interests

3. Institute a voluntary on-line registration system by March 2010 to include fees and daily limitations. P-7

This is preposterous and absurd. How can you collect fees and impose limitations thru an on-line and voluntary system? No enforcement possible.

4. GREEN. There is little green about 50 foot busses, except they are greener than 30 cars hauling the same number of folks. Or 1 50' bus is greener than 3 20 footers. Parking them on Jamieson is less green than parking them short term at Robinson (while the capability exists)But the long range approach is what? It is not discussed in the report adequately.

5. Establish designated routes by March 2010 for each category of motorcoach: a)DESTINATION eg hotels; b)DROP-OFF East of Washington Street, c)SIGHTSEEING with STEP-ON guides, and d)PASS THROUGH coaches.

I strongly oppose designated routes. It concentrates the pain and is unacceptable. Let the drivers sort out their routes. Secondly, there are many busses which sightsee, crawling thru town, where the driver is the guide; there are no provisions in the report yet for mandatory step-on guides for coaches. Are we having a new city program? Who pays for it? If it is a charge to the tour busses, how will it likely affect tourism, and the appreciation of our rich history in Alexandria? And finally, there is little under the law we can do about pass-thru busses, which are increasing in number due to the improved facilities and attractiveness of Mount Vernon. A number of these coaches do stop at Christ Church on the way to Mount Vernon, and there are two designated short term parking slots there for them.

6. Park short term on the South Side of Jamieson.p.8 item 5

No problem with this, but recommend continued use of Robinson area as long as space is available and the conditions there permit. The closer the busses park short term to dropoff the "greener" they are, the less polluting, and the less impact on traffic and the city's infrastructure. Allow them to choose their own routes to and from parking. Enforce idling restrictions. Insure they know thru communication and education that there are two parking venues. Robinson Terminal area, East side of N Union, and Jamieson. Consider in peak times having volunteer (or minimally-paid) parking coordinators on-site with communication equipment at Robinson and perhaps at Jamieson.

7. There are other issues, generally non-controversial, dealing with education, communication, signage and enforcement.

No significant objections.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS

1. A report's principal intent seems to be to regulate and to designate routes eventually (page 8) along 6 primary streets. This directly affects NOTICe members in the Pendleton, N. Fairfax, N. Royal area disproportionately. The specific rationale for any selected route is not identified. Until that is done, there is little fair choice but to allow the companies' drivers to choose the routes or perhaps develop some sort of method to at any given time distribute the coaches on the streets. These thoughts are not addressed in the report. Do not concentrate the pain under any circumstance.
2. Legal issues remain obscure despite some member's requests for clarification.
 - a. What is and what is not permitted currently under code/law in terms of size and scale of vehicle remains less than fully and clearly laid out.
 - b. There is open debate on the ability of the City now to regulate or place constraints/conditions on coaches passing through the city (on Rte 1 and Washington Street in particular). Some argue that enabling legislation from Richmond would be required. Others maintain the code as written allows the controls. The City so far is officially mute on the issue. Need official legal position.
 - c. There is the question of if you constrain one type vehicle, you must do it for all of similar/like size (eg busses and trucks). This impact has not at all been examined in any significant detail.
 - d. The entire issue of enforcement of existing law and code has been inadequately addressed. We have asked, but not yet provided with the Alexandria Title 10 (motor vehicle issues) requirements.